

Seaboard Airline Railway Station
(Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Passenger Station)
Datura Street and Tamarind Avenue
West Palm Beach
Palm Beach County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-233

HABS,
FLA,
50-PALM,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

SEABOARD AIRLINE RAILWAY STATION
(Seaboard Coast Line Railroad Passenger Station)

Location: Datura Street and Tamarind Avenue, West Palm Beach,
Palm Beach County, Florida.

Present Owner: Seaboard Coastline Railroad Company.

Present Occupant: AMTRAK since 1971, by lease.

Present Use: Railway passenger station.

Significance: This still functioning railway station was originally a prime example of the "Mediterranean" style of architecture, with elements of Spanish Renaissance and Baroque inspiration, so characteristic of southern Florida and the Palm Beach area.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATIONA. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1924-1925.
2. Architect: L. Phillips Clarke of Harvey & Clarke, Architects, AIA, 1926, was the designer for all the Seaboard stations. No further information concerning the firm is shown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Seaboard Airline Railroad Co. was the original owner and builder. In 1967 the company merged with the Atlantic Coastline Railway Company to become Seaboard Coastline Railroad Company and continued to operate its freight carriage system under this name. On May 1, 1971, West Palm Beach passenger service was taken under lease by AMTRAK, as it was nationwide, and as it continues today.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.
5. Original plans and construction: Not much is known. Architectural Forum, April 1926, shows one old view of main floor plan, and gives a list of specifications and data, and shows floor plan and old views.
6. Alterations and additions: The building remains in its original form except for minor interior alterations. Originally the building had separate white and black waiting rooms. The black waiting room has been made into offices. This alteration included the closing of two windows on the east of the old black waiting room and the addition of modern glass doors. The main waiting room has had its ceiling lowered in order to air-condition it. The rest of the building other than the baggage room has been air-conditioned also. If not closed originally fireplaces may have been bricked up then. In the waiting room one ticket window has been closed and rest-rooms added. Five exterior globe lamps have been removed since 1926.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Henry M. Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad Line reached Palm Beach in 1894. The Seaboard Airline Railroad Line laid tracks to Palm Beach as late as 1921-1924. It was after 1921 that the Seaboard Airline tracks reached West Palm Beach. Reference to the Seaboard Airline Railroad Station appears in a book printed in 1926. S. Davis Warfield was president of Seaboard Air Line and in 1924 Warfield built a cross-state line which serviced West Palm Beach and Miami and Homestead in 1926, making a direct rail connection from one coast to the other, across the state. In 1938 the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard Airline Railroad Line formed a network over Florida. Trains were air-conditioned, and streamlined, and power was generated by Diesel-electric locomotives.

Stockholders in the railroad were important Palm Beach residents, and this station combined their taste in architecture, and their desire for service and convenience, for the community related to their vacation and retirement residences.

L. Phillips Clarke, who designed all of the Seaboard Railroad stations, built his first station at Auburndale. The West Palm Beach station appeared in 1924-1925.

C. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Personal interview with Mrs. L. Phillips Clarke by Roger H. Grunke, Historic Sites Specialist with the Florida Department of State, Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee. Information from this interview on architect and structure.

b. Secondary and published information:

Architectural Forum, April 1926. "Station, Seaboard Airline Railway, West Palm Beach, Fla. by Harvey & Clarke, Architects." pp.265-6. [From the Benjamin Biderman Collection, HABS Library; shows old views and floor plan.]

Federal Writers Project. A Guide to the Southernmost State, Florida. New York: Oxford University Press, 1940. pp. 68-77.

Palm Beach Sun, 1947, Flagler Museum Archives, Box #4.

Palm Beach and West Palm Beach: The Artograph. West Palm Beach; Long and Murdock, 17 Stypmann Arcade, 1926.

Model Land Co. Book. Tampa: Russell Kay, 1891. (Flagler Museum)

Map of Palm Beach County, 1921. Cert. No. 173/280 by Carr and McFadden, Civil Engineers. (Flagler Museum)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This relatively small West Palm Beach railway station which served many famous visitors during the Florida Boom, is a good example of public architecture designed in an idiom fashionable at the time. It was a fitting introduction to the Spanish architectural style which the winter visitor would find predominant in the Palm Beach area.
2. Condition of fabric: The station since 1971 is in constant daily use and as a passenger station for AMTRAK has been maintained and kept in good repair. Certain renovations have been necessary to adapt it to current demands.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The north-south dimension, paralleling the tracks, is approximately 178'-0". It is 43'-0" deep, not including (at the sides) a 13'-0" platform on the west. The building is mainly one story high, with a single office in a two-story level near the center (not accessible) and a three-stage tower on the south corner of the east or entrance facade on Tamarind Avenue.
2. Foundations: Not known.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: Walls are of terra-cotta tile finished in rough stucco, painted peach-color, with white painted heavy cast-concrete Baroque trim on asymmetrical openings. The entrance way is developed into an elaborate two-story frontispiece.
4. Structural system, framing: Bearing walls have wood roof framing. Wood roof trusses are exposed in the baggage room.
5. Loggias, passenger platforms: There is a one-story 9'-6" deep loggia with segmental arched openings and quadripartite vaulted ceilings, at both the north and south ends of the building. The outer or front wall of the loggia continues as part of the east facade up to the main entrance, where it becomes the main entranceway frontispiece or screen wall, more than two stories high, penetrated by the main entrance, which leads to the main doors into the station.

The screen wall flanking the main entranceway to the north rises into a parapet, decorated with acanthus scrolls and niches in a series between corbeled pilasters, and surmounted by a broken entablature supporting a cresting of cartouche and arabesque panels separated by tall finials mounted on chamfered blocks.

The central section of the screen wall or extended loggia face, largely taken up with the arched entrance way, rises into a higher level where it is faced with a false arched gable end, displaying niches and corbeled pilasters flanking a central round window opening, infilled with stucco, and surrounded by a lobed Baroque frame. Here again, above and flanking the roundel, there is a terminal treatment in broken entablatures topped with low finials, both on the front and returning into the main wall of the second floor.

On the south side of the screen wall of the east facade--and mirroring asymmetrically the position of the north side's pediment with its niches, cresting, and finials--there rises a two-stage tower which makes up a large part of the massing of the facade.

On the rear, or the west side of the station, there runs a long shed-roofed passenger platform along the tracks, extending beyond the station and over the front of the parking lot. This covered passenger platform has exposed wood framing, and iron chains and pipes support the canopy. The soffit is of natural pecky cypress with copper gutters. Double carved brackets bolted together support the painted and beveled wood beams. The roof over the platform is covered with red clay tiles. Across the tracks, later platforms were constructed on the west and south. These have flat roofs supported by concrete columns and steel beams.

6. Chimneys: A masonry chimney at the north end is treated with four square corner pilasters and heavy crown molding topped with baluster finials and acanthus cresting. [It is suggested in the Architectural Forum article [see bibliography] that the appearance of a fireplace in the station was for ornament only. In that case the massive chimney could have been used for venting only.]
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Through the main entranceway, and the recessed area behind it, appears the main doorway to the public waiting room, consisting of double wood doors with fifteen lights each. The arched transom contains sixteen fixed lights. The doorway opening, 6'-7" x 7'-5", is trimmed with irregular quoins, and voussoirs, with a heavy cornice supported by brackets over pseudo-pilasters, half-height, and based on decorated corbels. The cornice supports a wrought-iron balcony, placed between finials and before a smaller glazed, segmental arched opening above.

The doors to the waiting room on the west or rear wall are similar to those on the east facade. On the southeast end of the building, at the baggage room and express office, there are two arched openings containing two types of doors, both 7'-6" x 7'-6".

Doors to the baggage room are vertical paneled, folding doors, and doors to the express office are vertical paneled sliding doors. Door frames are painted metal with concrete fenders at the jambs. An opening of similar width on the southwest or track side has recently been modernized and glazed, giving access to modern offices.

In the center of the building, the former waiting room for blacks has modern French doors in the 7'-0" x 7'-3" wood-framed opening. Doors have fifteen lights each. There is a double-hung window, 8'-7" wide, with eight-over-eight lights, in an arched opening adjacent to the doors. The transom above is glazed and the sill is concrete.

- b. Windows: Windows have wood sash. Windows in the waiting room are 4'-4" wide with wood casements, ten lights each. The arched openings are framed by cast concrete quoins and bracketed concrete sills. The bay window at the ticket office on the west consists of five arched windows, 3'-0" wide. They are single-hung, one-over-one lights. The two small windows on the east wall of the baggage room are wood, double-hung, four-over-four lights. These openings have concrete sills and rusticated lintels and are protected with wrought-iron grillwork. In the screen wall of the entrance facade are single window openings, empty, but each having denticulated Baroque headmold with finial. In the tower wall above there are key-hole shaped windows in a stepped arrangement, as though following a stair, and a matching third key-hole shaped window, one step down, and yet set high in the central bay.
- c. Roof, shape, covering: The roof over the main public rooms is gabled. The two-story section and tower have hipped roofs. A shed roof protects the west or track-side platform, covered with red clay knee tile. Roofing elsewhere appears to be asphalt shingles, including the roof of the tower.
- d. Cornice, eaves: The cornices are varied. Toward the south end of the east facade there is a 1/2-story level, above the cornices of the flanking baggage room and loggias, which contains cast concrete heraldic emblems flanking a bas-relief panel with the letters EXPRESS. Above this is a banded cornice decorated with modillions. The overhanging eaves are 1'-6" with exposed rafters and cypress soffit. Above the baggage room entrance there is a small nondescript arched pediment of cast concrete.
- e. Tower: On the south side of the screen wall of the east facade --mirroring asymmetrically the position of the north side's pediment with its niches, cresting, and finials--there rises a tower which makes up a large part of the massing of the east elevation.

The tower, which is chamfered at the corners, is open at the upper level--in what would correspond to a bell chamber--on all four sides. The three stages of the tower are marked off by cornice moldings--the lower in the form of a string course; the second but primary cornice treatment at the base of the third stage, and a lesser but final cornice at the eaves.

The arched openings on all four sides of the upper level surmount the heavy primary cornice which is interrupted with balustraded corbeled balconettes before the openings. These arched window openings, flanked by engaged Tuscan columns and scroll decorations in the spandrels are set in a shallow flat-arched recess.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: The Architectural Forum of April 1926 shows the Main Floor plan for the station. The plan is rectangular, divided essentially in half, with express room and baggage room to the left or south, and behind the loggia the two waiting rooms, now one, separated on the east by rest rooms and on the west by the ticket office. The loggia surrounds most of the front and ends, and the shed-roofed passenger platform on the rear or track side. Upper levels were not visited.
 - a. Waiting room: The floor is quarry tile. The walls are painted and scored to simulate ashlar. In the Architectural Forum reference is made to "plaster, sand finish," and "modulated plaster in waiting rooms and arcade." The cast-concrete base-board is 19" high, consisting of a 12" flat member capped with a torus and scotia molding. The modern acoustical tile ceiling with fluorescent lights is located just above a cast-concrete cornice molding. In the center of the waiting room area is a small alcove which leads to a set of stairs with winder treads. Flanking this alcove on the west is a modernized ticket counter in a rectangular opening. East of the alcove is an arched opening which is presently sealed. This shows the remains of a counter and concrete panels below. Evidently there were ticket counters on each side of the alcove. Moldings around the openings are drawn in a series of bands and curves. The double doors on the east (front) wall are flanked by two engaged twisted columns supported on door-height cast brackets. The brackets are decorated with acanthus, griffins, faces, and torus and egg-and-dart moldings. The columns continue up to support a projection of cornice as an entablature. Over the center of the door, the cornice molding projects out as a cone-shaped bracket. This was probably a base for a niche now covered by the modern ceiling.

On the north wall is a large fireplace now painted green. It is framed by two cast-concrete columns engaged to outer pilasters which frame smaller internal pilasters. The latter are decorated with urns, faces, flowers, and acanthus arabesques. The baseboard projects to form the plinth for the columns. Column capitals are reversed Ionic scrolls which are surmounted by a bracketed cast-concrete entablature decorated with a shield and eagle bordered by profile medallions, urns, and acanthus arabesques. The mantel is decorated with dentils combined with egg-and-dart molding, several flat projecting bands, and bead-and-reel molding. Two concrete urns painted white rest on the projecting ends of the mantel. The fireplace has cast-stone voussoirs forming a segmental arch opening, and straight-sided fireplace cheeks which have been centrally chamfered.

It is implied in the Architectural Forum article [see bibliography] that the appearance of a fireplace here was strictly for ornamentation: "Why the Richardsonian custom of including an ornate chimneypiece and useless fireplace was followed in this railroad station in the tropics is hard to understand, unless as an ornament." Certainly this is not known to have been used in the past fifty years.

- b. Baggage room: The floor is concrete. Walls and ceiling are painted tongue-and-groove beaded vee-joint siding. There is a gabled skylight with wire-glass in the center of the office space. The rectangular steel trusses are partially exposed.

1. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: The Architectural Forum article [see above] refers also to heating in the "Outline of Specifications" and notes "Open fireplace in waiting room; gas connections elsewhere."

It is possible that although the fireplaces were never functional, that the large chimney on the roof was used for air venting. There are, however, no further records here of any gas heating.

D. Site:

- 1.. General setting: The long axis of the station is oriented north-south, parallel to Tamarind Avenue on the east, which forms its east boundary, and to the railroad tracks on the west. The east facade, with the main entrance, is practically on axis with Datura Street, which comes to a dead end at the station. South of the property is the City of West Palm Beach Water Works. Between passenger loading platforms and Tamarind Avenue there is a parking lot.

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Summer 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

A Florida project to survey the historic architecture of Palm Beach and to emphasize written historical and architectural data was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in cooperation with the Historical Society of Palm Beach County and the Florida Board of Archives and History in the summer of 1971. Under the direction of James C. Massey, then Chief of HABS, the project was carried out in the Historic American Buildings Survey field office in the Flagler Museum, Whitehall Way, Palm Beach, with Professor Woodrow W. Wilkins, AIA (University of Miami) Project Supervisor; Richard C. Crisson, Architect (University of Florida); Richard High, Student Architect (Georgia Institute of Technology); and Bryan Bowman, Student Historian (University of Florida). Under the general direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS from March 1972, additional documentation was prepared and archival photographs for the project were taken, in April 1972, by Jack E. Boucher, HABS photographer. Editing and final preparation of the documentation was carried out in 1980 in the HABS Washington office by Lucy Pope Wheeler of the HABS professional staff.

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ADDENDUM TO:
SEABOARD AIRLINE RAILWAY STATION
(SEABOARD COAST LINE RAILROAD
PASSENGER STATION)
Datura Street and Tamarino Avenue
Palm Beach
Palm Beach County
Florida

HABS No. FL-233

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